



Mitigation Plays Strategic Role in Local Land Use Planning

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Polk County, Minnesota

Polk County, MN - The City of East Grand Forks, Minnesota is a shining example of a community successful in both reducing the threat of flooding and planning for a prosperous future. After the 1997 flood impacted 90 percent of the city and its residents, city officials uniquely tied their emergency management efforts to their planning efforts. The results have been a stronger, disaster-resistant community.



Even though the flooding of 1997 was catastrophic, it did not weaken community spirit.

The city chose to revive itself and turn the disaster into a positive experience with forward-thinking results. The many mitigation projects directly influenced the immediate and long-term future of this prosperous city and gave the city a unique opportunity to plan a new, thriving future.

Planning for a new city is exactly what East Grand Forks has accomplished. Since the Red River divides East Grand Forks, Minnesota and Grand Forks, North Dakota, the cities coordinate their efforts by working with the Grand Forks – East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization. The East Grand Forks 2035 Land Use Plan considers the projected needs of the city, including flood protection and economic growth.

East Grand Forks lays at the confluence of Red River and Red Lake River. Although the threat of flooding has been considered since the city's first Land Use Plan in 1978, it wasn't until the devastating 1997 flood and massive buyouts that the city realized just how much the floodplain would dictate their planning efforts. Nancy Ellis, Senior Planner for East Grand Forks, said, "The mitigation we did after 1997 was a driving force behind our 2035 Land Use Plan. Our new public, green space and increased housing needs warranted specific action by city officials."

Following the 1997 flood, the city implemented an Accelerated Acquisition Program using the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) administered by the Minnesota Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. The HMGP project allowed the city to acquire 370 flood damaged properties. As part of the HMGP regulations, deed restrictions were placed on all the newly acquired public properties to prevent future development and flood losses.

Not only did residents need to repair and rebuild, but city government buildings and services also had to relocate. The City Hall, library, and three public schools were relocated and built new after the flood. Their location had to be planned and laid out in the city's new look. The city's downtown business district, adjacent to over a hundred buyouts, was protected from flooding with an innovative invisible floodwall. The area has recovered to become stronger with more opportunity for economic growth.

The city's green space serves as flood protection and has become a model for sustainable floodplain management. The successful combination of land use planning and flood mitigation has shown how a city can protect itself from floods while attracting visitors. Since the 1997 flood, the city has experienced significant flooding in 2001, 2002, 2006, and 2009. Each year the city has benefited from the success of their planning effort: each flood event was a non-event. No major damages occurred, and the city watched the water rise and fall without much disruption.

Although green space accounts for an unusually high proportion (almost 16 percent) of the city's land, the green space is essential. The Greenway, which refers to the green space on both the Minnesota and North Dakota sides of the Red River, is part of a planned regional greenway and flood protection system that someday may reach from Lake Traverse in Minnesota to Lake Winnipeg in Canada.

The city's green space encompasses 1,230 acres and is a direct result of the hundreds of buyouts after the 1997 flood. The city obtained state designation of green space as the Red River State Recreation Area (SRA). The SRA is managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and runs along the Red and Red Lake rivers' floodplain throughout the city. The camping areas are strategically located next to downtown shopping and restaurants.

By focusing on flood protection for the city, the planning effort has effectively and realistically protected its citizens from future floods while assuring a high quality of life. Nancy Ellis reminds us that "The city has accomplished the challenging task of

becoming flood resistant while maintaining and growing their economic development opportunities; it's a great triumph." The city's successful planning efforts give the city new life and its residents a new reason to be proud of their town and its future.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Minnesota**

County: **Polk County**

City/Community: **East Grand Forks**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts**

Activity/Project Start Date: **05/1997**

Activity/Project End Date: **11/1998**

Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**

Funding Recipient: **Local Government**

Funding Recipient Name: **City of East Grand Forks**

Application/Project Number: **1175.01**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$14,942,000.00 (Actual)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**

Federal Disaster #: **1175 , 04/08/1997**

Federal Disaster Year: **1997**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **1370 , 05/16/2001**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.ci.east-grand-forks.mn.us/>

Reference URL 2: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/red_river/index.html

Main Points

No Main Points were entered.